



March 4, 2010

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 300 - An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for
Certain Municipal Employees

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and members of the Committee:

My name is Janette Smith, and I am a paraprofessional at Mansfield Middle School in Mansfield Public Schools.

I am here today to talk about legislation that would correct a long-standing disparity that unfairly impacts public school paraeducators in Connecticut. **I respectfully urge you to support Senate Bill 300, An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.**

Parents and elected officials are now beginning to understand that as paraprofessionals, we have some of the most demanding jobs in a school, but many members of the public either do not know who we are or what we do. We frequently work one-on-one with special needs students, particularly the ever-growing number with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

However, there are many important benefits and considerations that are not afforded to our paraprofessionals, but are to teachers, school administrators, and other public employees.

The reality is that in Connecticut, paraprofessionals do not legally have access to the rights granted under the Family and Medical Leave Act. We do not work the minimum 1,200 total hours per year required by federal law, yet many of us are considered full-time employees.

In my own situation, I face the challenge of caring for my terminally ill father, who lives in Danbury, 80 miles away from our home in Coventry. Right now, I am able to manage getting out to see him as often as possible without interfering with my schedule at work. I'm fortunate to have the weekends and school breaks to be able to see him.

But if his situation were to worsen, I would hate to have to choose between the students I serve and my own father. I simply want to be treated the same as other employees when it comes to family and

medical leave.

Amending the law so that paraprofessionals have access to Family and Medical Leave Act protections is commonsense and fundamentally fair. **The 2,600 public school employees in my Union and I respectfully urge you to support SB 300 to correct the inequity we face today.**

Thank you for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

Janette Smith

Instructional Assistant, Mansfield Middle School
Chapter 1112 Vice-President, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

JS:dmo